

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend Claims 1, 13, 14, and 23-25 to read as follows.

1. (Currently Amended) A sheet processing apparatus, comprising:
 - sheet stacking means for stacking sheets;
 - sheet processing means for processing the sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means ~~with aligned upstream edges, the upstream edge of each sheet being the most upstream portion of each sheet with respect to a conveying direction of the sheets;~~
 - a sheet holding portion which stores supplied sheets while preceding sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means are processed by the sheet processing means;
 - sheet conveying means for conveying the sheets stored in the sheet holding portion to the sheet stacking means in a conveying direction and defining upstream and downstream edges of the supplied sheets with respect to the conveying direction;
 - an abutment stopper, provided in the sheet holding portion, against which the upstream edges of the supplied sheets abut; and
 - sheet conveying means for conveying the sheets stored in the sheet holding portion to the sheet stacking means,
 - wherein the supplied sheets are held in the sheet holding portion with their upstream edges aligned by moving the supplied sheets ~~held in the sheet holding portion in a direction opposite to the conveying direction~~ to abut against the abutment stopper until the last sheet of the sheets to be stored is supplied in the sheet holding portion, and

wherein the stored sheets are ~~discharged~~ conveyed to the sheet stacking means from the sheet holding portion by the sheet conveying means when a downstream edge in the conveying direction of the last sheet of the sheets to be stored has projected from preceded the downstream edges ~~in the conveying direction~~ of the sheets held in the sheet holding portion by a predetermined amount.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising control means for controlling the number of sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the sheet processing means.

4. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising control means for performing:

a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including subjecting the preceding sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means to processing with the sheet processing means and simultaneously causing the subsequent sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion; and

a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action including not causing the specific sheet to be stored in the sheet holding portion but, after the discharging of the preceding sheets, causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding portion to be stacked on the sheet stacking means.

5. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 4,
wherein the specific sheet is at least one selected from the group consisting of a
sheet with a length equal to or larger than a predetermined length, a sheet for an overhead
projector, a color printed sheet, a sheet designated as a top cover, a sheet designated as thick
paper, a sheet designated as thin paper, and a sheet with a tab.

6. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,
wherein the sheet processing means is a stapler for stitching a sheet stack.

7. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,
wherein the sheet conveying means comprises a first rotary member and a second
rotary member which rotate in contact with the sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means from
both sides of the sheets.

8. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,
wherein the sheet holding portion holds the supplied sheets linearly.

9. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,
wherein the sheet holding portion comprises:
moving means for moving the supplied sheets to abut the upstream edges thereof
against the abutment stopper.

10. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 3 or 4, wherein the sheet processing means is a stapler for stitching a sheet stack, and the control means increases the number of sheets, which are stored in the sheet holding means, in proportion to positions to be stitched by the stapler.

11. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet; and
a sheet processing apparatus which applies processing to the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means,
wherein the sheet processing apparatus is a sheet processing apparatus according to any one of claims 1, and 3 to 9.

12. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;
the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1 which applies processing to the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means; and
control means for controlling the number of the sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the sheet processing means.

13. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus, comprising:
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;

the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1 which applies processing to the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means; and control means for performing:

a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including subjecting the preceding sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means to processing with the sheet processing means and simultaneously causing the subsequent sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion; and

a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action including not causing the specific sheet to be stored in the sheet holding portion but, after the discharging of the preceding sheets, causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding portion to be stacked on the sheet stacking means.

14. (Currently Amended) A sheet processing apparatus, comprising:

a processing tray on which sheets are stacked;
a processing unit which processes the sheets stacked on the processing tray ~~with aligned upstream edges, the upstream edge of each sheet being the most upstream portion of each sheet with respect to a conveying direction of the sheet;~~

a sheet holding portion which stores supplied sheets while preceding sheets stacked on the processing tray are processed by the processing unit;

a sheet discharging rotary member which conveys the supplied sheets stored in the sheet holding portion to the processing tray in a conveying direction and which defines upstream and downstream edges of the supplied sheets with respect to the conveying direction;

an abutment stopper, provided in the sheet holding portion, against which the upstream edges of the supplied sheets abut; and

~~sheet discharging rotary member which discharges the sheets stored in the sheet holding portion to the processing tray;~~

wherein the supplied sheets are held in the sheet holding portion with their upstream edges in a discharging conveying direction thereof aligned by moving the supplied sheets ~~held in the sheet holding portion~~ in a direction opposite to the conveying direction to abut against the abutment stopper until the last sheet of the sheets to be stored is supplied in the sheet holding portion, and

wherein the stored sheets are conveyed ~~discharged~~ to the processing tray from the sheet holding portion by the sheet discharging rotary member when a downstream edge in the discharging conveying direction of the last sheet of the sheets to be stored has projected preceded the downstream edges ~~in the discharging direction~~ of the sheets held in the sheet holding portion by a predetermined amount.

15. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, further comprising a control portion which controls the number of sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the processing unit.

16. (Previously Presented) An sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, further comprising a control portion which performs:

a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including subjecting the preceding sheets stacked on the processing tray to processing with the processing unit and simultaneously causing the subsequent sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion; and

a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action including not causing the specific sheet to be stored in the sheet holding portion but, after the discharging of the preceding sheets, causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding portion to be stacked on the processing tray.

17. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the specific sheet is at least one selected from the group consisting of a sheet with a length equal to or larger than a predetermined length, a sheet for an overhead projector, a color printed sheet, a sheet designated as a top cover, a sheet designated as thick paper, a sheet designated as thin paper, and a sheet with a tab.

18. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the processing unit is a stapler which stitches a sheet stack.

19. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the sheet discharging rotary member comprises a first rotary member and a second rotary member which rotate in contact with the sheets stacked on the processing tray from both sides of the sheets.

20. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the sheet holding portion holds the supplied sheets linearly.
21. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the sheet holding portion comprises:
a return roller which moves the supplied sheets to abut the upstream edges of the sheets against the abutment stopper.
22. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 15 or 16, wherein the processing unit is a stapler for stitching a sheet stack, and the control portion increases the number of sheets, which are stored in the sheet holding portion, in proportion to positions to be stitched by the stapler.
23. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus, comprising:
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet; and
a sheet processing apparatus which applies processing to processes the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means,
wherein the sheet processing apparatus is a sheet processing apparatus according to claims 14-21.

24. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus, comprising:

image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;

the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14 which applies processing to
processes the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means; and

a control portion which controls the number of the sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the processing unit.

25. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus, comprising:

image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;

the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14 which applies processing to
processes the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means; and

a control portion which performs:

a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including subjecting the preceding sheets stacked on the processing tray to stitch processing with the processing unit and simultaneously causing the subsequent sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion; and

a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action including not causing the specific sheet to be stored in the sheet holding portion but, after the discharging of the preceding sheets, causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding portion to be stacked on the processing tray.